



Indiana Department of Education  
SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

# School Quality Review Report:

## ***Dickinson Intermediate Fine Arts Academy***

*Review dates:* **Wednesday, October 19 – Thursday, October 20**

*Address:* 4404 Elwood, South Bend, IN 46628

*Principal:* Mr. Thomas Sims

*Lead reviewer:* James Larson

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## **Part 1: Information about the School Quality Review**

In 1999, the Indiana General Assembly enacted Public Law 221 (P.L. 221) which serves as Indiana's accountability model for schools and districts. In response to the accountability process, the State Board of Education developed a requirement that schools in year four of probationary status participate in the School Quality Review from a Technical Assistance Team (TAT).

The goal of the School Quality Review was to identify Dickinson Intermediate Fine Arts Academy's strengths and areas for improvement relative to the following three domains: Readiness to Learn, Readiness to Teach and Readiness to Act. Within the three domains are twelve characteristics of high poverty, high performing schools as determined by Mass Insight Education's review of the research. The domains and the characteristics were converted into rubrics and processes to examine the various aspects of the school through multiple methods.

The actual review consisted of the Technical Assistance Team (TAT) visiting the school for two days. The TAT was comprised of the following members: the Director of School Improvement and Turnaround, School Improvement and Turnaround Specialists, an Indiana exceptional educator and a community member from the South Bend area. During the two days, the TAT (1) conducted focus groups of students, teachers, parents, and community parents, (2) visited fifteen classrooms for a minimum of fifteen minutes each and (3) interviewed school and district administrators. Prior to the visit, teachers completed an online survey with 47 of 50 teachers participating. The school leadership responded to a different online survey. Both surveys were aligned to the research on the best practices of high-performing, high-poverty schools.

This report summarizes the key findings for each of the three domains: Readiness to Learn, Readiness to Teach, and Readiness to Act, provides a narrative of data supporting those key findings, and offers recommendations for school-wide improvement.

## Part 2: The School Context

Location: Dickinson Intermediate Fine Arts Academy (DFAA) is a South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) school located in Northwest South Bend, Indiana, about four miles from downtown. The school's boundaries contain two of South Bend's public housing communities, LaSalle Landing and Harbor Homes, as well as at least three subsidized housing communities, which gives Dickinson a high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

History: Dickinson Intermediate School opened in July of 1976. In 2008, after over three decades as a regular intermediate school in South Bend, the district designated Dickinson as a "Fine Arts Academy" and identified it as a magnet school option for students in SBCSC. Although DFAA is a magnet school, the district does not provide transportation for any students living outside of the school's boundaries, so students wanting to attend DFAA from another school must find their own transportation to and from school. The school's transformation into a Fine Arts Academy was supported by a federal grant that was awarded to the school corporation in the fall of 2007. Along with an infusion of resources and a change in the school's focus towards the arts, 85 percent of the teaching staff was turned over. Teacher retention has been a continuous struggle since that point, with high turnover rates each year since the school was turned into a magnet. The program has most recently been supported through a grant from Magnet Schools of America; however the funding from that grant runs out at the end of the 2011-2012 school year.

In July of 2011, SBCSC submitted an application to the Indiana Department of Education on behalf of DFAA, for a School Improvement Grant (SIG) under the Transformational Model. The application was denied due to a failure to provide enough evidence to address all of the required components of the SIG application. Many required components went completely unaddressed in the application from the school corporation. Also, the application gave limited data regarding the proven effectiveness of the proposed external providers, failed to provide any evidence of the new principal's track record of success in similar schools, and fell short of explaining how a number of new initiatives (TAP, 8-Step Process, Professional Development for Infusing Fine Arts into Instruction) would be implemented in coordination with each other, in a way that ensures the efficacy of each.

Student Demographics: During the 2010-2011 school year, 621 students attended Dickinson Fine Arts Academy. The demographic breakdown of the student population is as follows:

- 47 percent Black, 30 percent White, 15 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent identified as other. English Language Learners comprised 8.7 percent of the student population, almost double that of the state average of 4.7 percent.
- In 2010-2011, the Free and Reduced Lunch population was 75.2 percent, above the district and state average of 68.3 and 46.8 percent respectively.

- The percent of students qualifying for Special Education Services is 22.7 percent, higher than the district and state averages of 18.8 and 14.7 percent respectively.
- The school's attendance rate is at 96.3 percent, higher than the state average of 95.9 percent.

Student Performance: Academic achievement data from 2006 to 2008 showed a negative trend, declining each year; however from 2009-2011 there is a trend of improvement in overall performance on the ISTEP+ assessment. In 2011, 32.9 percent of students passed both sections of the ISTEP+, up 4 percent from the previous year, but is still significantly lower than the average passing rates of other Indiana schools of 71.3 percent.

The percentage of students who passed the ELA section of the ISTEP+ is 47.2 percent, up 5 percent from the previous year. Although the school has shown a trend of improvement over the past 3 years, their scores far fall below the state average of 77.7 percent for ELA.

The ISTEP+ passing percentages for the Math section was 45.1 percent in 2011, up from 42.1 percent the previous year, but far below the state average of 79.3 percent.

Staff: Administrative staff at Dickinson Fine Arts Academy includes the principal, who was transferred to Dickinson in August of 2011, a few weeks before the school year began; and an assistant principal, who also started in August of 2011.

There are 39 teachers at Dickinson, 12 of which are new to the building this school year. According to the teacher survey, approximately 50 percent of the school's instructional team has been at the building for 3 years or less.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### A. *Domain 1: Readiness to Learn: Poor*

#### 1.1: Safety, Discipline, and Engagement – Poor

**Minimal evidence exists that the school culture, environment, and student engagement are routine and consistent.**

1.1a – Evidence that students are effectively encouraged to behave well, relate well to others and to have positive attitudes toward learning is present but limited and/or inconsistent.

The principal and the assistant principal described renewed efforts to establish a positive and pervasive school culture throughout the school. They specifically discussed providing teachers with support for classroom management and following through with student behavioral referrals to the office. Almost universally, classroom observations confirmed that students are held to uniform behavior standards. In the student focus group, participants expressed great appreciation for the administration's consistent follow-through with consequences for behavioral infractions. While students were compliant in classrooms and during transitions, levels of engagement and investment in their learning were cited as a concern by the review team. Although students were not outwardly disobedient, there were many instances in which students were clearly disengaged in the lesson, as evidenced by their lack of materials, participation and eye contact.

1.1b – Minimal evidence exists that classrooms and hallways provide an attractive and stimulating environment that fosters high academic and personal expectations.

Across most classrooms, the review team observed bulletin boards tracking students' performance on three-week assessments tied to the 8-Step process. These displays were creative and prominently displayed in classrooms. Teachers frequently spoke about how these displays, and the frequency with which they are updated, serve as sources of academic motivation for students. However, student work related to these or other assessments was infrequently observed by the review team. Moreover, teachers confessed that the academic performance tracking bulletin boards were sources of frustration for some students who were not pleased with their status. To ameliorate these anxieties, the review team suggests more prominent displays of student work, including teacher feedback and rubrics, to diversify acknowledgements of students' academic portfolios.

1.1c – Minimal evidence exists that school routines and rules are implemented consistently and communicated clearly to students, parents and staff.

As noted previously, the principal and the assistant principal are prioritizing the enforcement of the existing student code of conduct. In addition, the principal described the creation of a Saturday School program with an academic component. This program is designed as an alternative to out-of-school suspension in hopes of improving student attendance and infusing academic support into discipline methods. Although evidence exists that school routines and rules are implemented with consistency, parents expressed concerns about the

communication of said routines and rules. For instance, the principal described a forthcoming change to the student uniform policy, eliminating white polo shirts as an option due to cleanliness concerns. During the parent focus group, concerns were shared about the communication of this change as well as students' class schedules, athletic opportunities and extra-curricular programming. While the principal did share that he has held three parent meetings already this year and is working with parents to launch a parent-teacher organization (PTO), it is clear that the level of communication about school routines and rules is still insufficient. Representatives in the parent focus group described the need for a multi-faceted approach, utilizing traditional (e.g. snail mail, letters sent home with students) and modern (e.g. Facebook, email, automated phone calls) methods.

1.1d – Evidence that the school has effective measures for promoting good attendance and eliminating truancy and tardiness is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

While the previous academic year's attendance data is above the state average, the building leadership believes attendance and truancy can and should be addressed. The principal described a new community partnership to launch a school-based television program, which will be aired every morning. In addition to the enrichment benefits, the principal also hopes that this program will encourage more students to arrive on-time for school. However, this program and partnership have yet to formally launch and as such, it is unclear how effective it will be in curbing students' truancy.

1.1e – Limited evidence exists that a robust core program ensures that students develop key learning and personal skills.

Through the 8-Step process and its corresponding "Success Period," there is a concerted effort to improve students' reading, writing and math knowledge and skills. Art teachers engaged in three weeks of professional development focused on incorporating core content into their respective curricula. In addition, district-wide pacing guides and "Success Period" materials were created over the summer to support the implementation of the 8-Step process at DFAA. As these components are new this academic year, the review team identified several areas of concern pertaining to their implementation. As will be discussed further in the next section, instructional methods associated with reading, writing and math lessons are particularly one-dimensional, perhaps given the short assessment window. Rather than focusing on most or all standards with the 8-Step process, identifying and explicitly addressing a smaller number of power standards with students will allow teachers to employ project-based and/or thematic methods to build students' mastery.

1.1f – Minimal evidence exists that the school provides a well-rounded curriculum and enrichment activities, adding interest and relevance.

This indicator is of special concern given that the school is rendered a fine arts magnet program, yet its programmatic elements are seemingly no different than fine arts programs at traditional public schools. While there are fine arts classes offered during the school day (e.g. studio art, choir), these same classes are traditionally offered at public schools without a stated fine arts focus. Additionally, although there are fine arts-focused enrichment activities after-school, they are limited in their scope and frequency. For example, DFAA has a piano

lab that is under-utilized given that it lacks a piano teacher to deliver in-school and/or after-school programming. In their focus group, students stressed their enjoyment of existing fine arts opportunities and a fervent desire for additional programs. Observations of arts classes confirmed that students are highly engaged and enriched by existing offerings. A common theme raised throughout the quality review was the notion that labeling Dickinson Middle School a fine arts magnet served as a “band-aid” solution to rebranding and improving the school. As evidence of this concern, interviewees cited the lack of student selection criteria, inequitable distribution of resources and absence of a sustainability plan for the DFAA magnet. While other magnets within the district have selection criteria for students who attend, DFAA does not. In addition, community partners, parents and school-based staff put forth concerns about an inequitable distribution of magnet-related resources across the district and its particularly deleterious impact on DFAA. Taken together, there is little evidence to suggest that the district has invested resources into DFAA to substantiate the magnet designation. Lastly, given that this is the final year of the grant that supported the launch of the fine arts magnet, concerns about the sustainability of the limited fine arts opportunities at DFAA were shared by numerous stakeholder groups.

1.1g – Limited evidence exists that career education and personal goal setting are used to raise student aspirations and motivation.

As a part of the 8-Step process, data talks are utilized to build students’ investment in their academic performance. However, efforts to augment these conversations with in-school or out-of-school enrichment to develop students’ understanding of careers and opportunities are limited. During the community partners focus group, participants described plans and aspirations for launching programs that would address this need. The principal also discussed the augmentation of partnerships designed to promote students’ academic and personal goal setting as priorities. However, these developments remain mainly in the planning stage and as such, their impact is yet to be determined.

## **1.2: Action against Adversity - Poor**

**Minimal evidence exists that the school directly addresses students’ poverty-driven deficits.**

1.2a – Minimal evidence exists that the school knows and understands the personal as well as academic needs of the students in order to address the effects of students’ poverty head-on.

Some community partnerships designed to address students’ social and personal needs exist. During the community partnership focus group, the review team learned about efforts to provide wrap-around services, deliver an abstinence-based health program and offer tutoring on every other Saturday. While additional programming as well as greater coordination of existing programs should be priorities, creating and solidifying information-sharing between school-based staff and community partners regarding students’ personal and academic needs will be necessary to maximize the impact of these support structures. Pulling together a student support team – comprised of the school’s counselor, FACS coordinator, special education director, and other relevant staff – to ensure program participation is aligned with



students' demonstrated needs will be critical to leveraging the potential benefits of these community partnerships.

1.2b – Minimal evidence exists that the school addresses the needs of families so that they can better support student learning.

During the parent focus group, a small number of participants described their efforts to offer programming for parents in conjunction with their plans for establishing a PTO at the school. Additionally, the principal described a parent group he convened early in the year to establish a collective goal and vision for the year. This group of parents has also been designated as the foundation for the new PTO. However, the guidance counselor was not hired until directly before the start of school and as such the bulk of her time has been dedicated to administrative responsibilities such as scheduling. She did share plans to start student support groups, which in turn could help her communicate students' personal and academic needs to their families. In short, efforts to support parents, both in terms of their skills and their abilities to support their children, are in an initial stage of development.

1.2c – Evidence that the school develops students' skills, behaviors, and values that enable them to effectively advocate for themselves is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The principal recently launched a "Student Ambassador" program to provide a select group of children with leadership opportunities. Participants in this program were chosen to participate in the student focus group. When asked to describe what they had done so far as student ambassadors, they responded that participating in the focus group was their first activity. Thus while a student leaders program has been initiated, it must be expanded and developed to cultivate participants' self-confidence and self-efficacy. The principal also reported launching a cheerleading program and intentionally selecting girls to participate who need an incentive and extra layer of support to remain academically and behaviorally sound. The principal reports that participating in cheerleading has had the desired positive impact on many of the selected girls. Beyond these two examples, there are limited opportunities for students to develop conflict resolution, anger management and life skills designed to imbue them with the ability to overcome adversity.

### **1.3: Close Student- Adult Relationships – Fair**

**Evidence that students' relationships with mentors/teachers are positive and enduring is present, but inconsistent.**

1.3a – Minimal evidence exists that the school works with parents to build positive relationships and to engage them as partners in their children's learning.

While plans and initial efforts to bolster communication between the school and families have begun, there is substantial work to be done in this area. The principal reported conducting three parent information sessions thus far, but participation has dwindled significantly from the first session (approximately 250 parents) to the most recent session (less than 10 parents). The school leaders recognize that this is an area warranting significant investment and attention. Towards this end, the principal and a few parents who participated in the focus group described plans to launch a PTO chapter at DFAA. In addition, the idea of

initiating a “Parent University” to augment parents’ engagement in their children’s learning was shared by those who are launching the PTO. While these efforts are commendable, there are immediate areas of concern pertaining to family and community outreach. At present, there is not a school representative in the front office with Spanish-speaking skills. Having such a person in the front office is just one, albeit critical, way to build positive relationships with students’ families. The FACS coordinator is also new to the school this year. Her ability to leverage parents and community partners to assist her efforts to engage each segment of the school’s parent community will also be critical to ensuring outreach efforts are widespread. Given the critical nature of the FACS coordinator’s work to broader school improvement efforts at DFAA, the district should provide additional support and training in order to maximize the potential of this critical position.

1.3b – Evidence that the school is successful in implementing a variety of strategies specifically designed to promote a sense of connection between students and adults is routine and consistent.

Classroom and hallway observations as well as student and parent interviews confirm that positive student-adult relationships are prevalent within DFAA. While additional efforts must be made to strengthen communication between teachers/staff/administrators at DFAA and families, it is clear that efforts to establish connective student-adult relationships have been successful. For instance, students are often paired with a teacher they do not otherwise have during the day for their “Success Period.” Interviewees cited “Success Period” as a place where teachers are able to mentor students and provide individualized attention and support. Additionally, a select group of teachers currently volunteer after school to deliver art enrichment classes. These enrichment opportunities also establish and strengthen positive student-adult relationships. While these art enrichment opportunities contribute to a sense of community between students and adults within DFAA, they do not constitute sufficient enough programming to substantiate the school’s art magnet label.

## ***B. Domain 2: Readiness to Teach: Fair***

### **2.1: Shared Responsibility for Achievement – Fair**

**Evidence that the school’s organizational structure is routine and consistent is present, but limited.**

2.1a – Evidence that the principal ensures that there is strong accountability for student achievement throughout the school is routine and consistent.

The principal has established and reinforces a laser-like focus on improving students’ academic performance. He and his leadership team have identified and are consistently supporting a focused set of initiatives, which are aligned and directly related to raising student achievement. Opinions shared during teacher, student and family focus groups provided evidence to confirm the consistency with which strong accountability for student achievement exists. Specifically, parents reported that at the principal’s “meet the principal” event, he was the first person either at the school or district level to inform them that DFAA is in their fourth year of academic probation. While parents expressed shock at this

announcement, they also shared with the review team a deep sense of appreciation for the principal's honesty and openness pertaining to this critical issue.

2.1b – Evidence that the staff feels deep accountability and missionary zeal for student achievement is routine and consistent.

Across classrooms, bulletin boards routinely and prominently displayed student performance data in creative and developmentally appropriate manners. During conversations with teachers, student achievement and the underlying data were at the core of the discussions. While there are numerous challenges surrounding the 8-Step process, teachers are invested and committed to ensuring it is successfully implemented at DFAA this year. Feedback from students also confirmed that the staff is deeply committed to driving student achievement.

2.1c – Evidence that a shared commitment to a vision of the school, including challenging goals for all students is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The staff and school leaders have a common vision centered on student achievement. This vision distills into a core set of initiatives, including the 8-Step process, which are ubiquitous across the school. However, the establishment and reinforcement of challenging goals for all students is not yet a consistent phenomenon at DFAA. Through the 8-Step process, the staff is determining levels of support needed by students to demonstrate skill and knowledge mastery as well as address skill and knowledge gaps. In one instance, the reviewers heard about seventh-grade students reading fifth-grade level literature. While this type of remediation will be necessary for some students, it is vital to develop plans and materials to scaffold students' skill and content knowledge development to close identified gaps. Although the 8-Step process is a conduit for the identification of areas for remediation, additional work is needed to create individualized learning plans that identify how students will be challenged to accelerate their learning in a way that tracks for and ensures more than a year's worth of academic gains during the course of a single academic year.

2.1d – Minimal evidence exists that the school corporation drives the accountability agenda.

During the summer, the school corporation supported the meaningful incorporation of the 8-Step process at DFAA and other district schools by enlisting a cadre of teachers to create core content pacing guides and "Success Period" curricula. There were, however, numerous concerns raised by teachers about the process and deliverables related to this initiative. Interviewees described how district representatives delivered markedly different expectations for those working on the language arts materials as opposed to those tasked with the mathematics resources. As a result, the language arts pacing guides do not include vital sections, resources and vocabulary, which are included in the mathematics pacing guides. Interviewees cited the absence of resource lists and vocabulary for each phase of the pacing guide as major deficiencies that limit the utility of these pacing guides. Additionally, the quality of "Success Period" curricula was also called into question. Respondents raised concerns that the materials were at best a "roadmap" for instruction, but required much more development to ensure the lessons were engaging. Moreover, the review team frequently heard concerns about differences between the three-week assessment questions and the "Success Period" curricula. More specifically, we often heard about significant disparities in

how questions were worded on the assessments and the language used in “Success Period” materials. Consequently, students and teachers are discouraged by the fact that even the most effective use of the “Success Period” materials often results in many students scoring lower than expected due to variance in question wording. While the staff at DFAA described creative, building-specific efforts they are embarking on to address these discrepancies, the review team believes the district should dedicate resources to improving these critical assessments, pacing guides and “Success Period” curricula. This will ensure the DFAA staff can focus their energy on implementing, versus creating and implementing core content and corresponding assessments.

## **2.2: Personalization of Instruction – Fair**

**Evidence that assessment data is being used to personalize instruction is present, but limited.**

2.2a – Evidence that the school utilizes a coherent system to provide detailed tracking and analysis of assessment results is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The school-wide adoption of the 8-Step process necessitated the creation of infrastructure to track and analyze student assessment data. Teachers and school leaders are heavily invested in the success of this initiative. However, both groups expressed concerns and shared lessons learned pertaining to their early stumbles with regard to 8-Step implementation. Many of these roadblocks have been discussed in previous sections (e.g. the quality of “Success Period” materials), but one obvious barrier stems from the fact that roughly a quarter of DFAA’s teachers are new to the building this year and 8-Step training took place last spring. Consequently, not only is the 8-Step process in its first year at DFAA, it is also a brand new initiative for a sizable portion of the staff. As such, while a system for the tracking and management of student performance data is in place, it has yet to become pervasively implemented with fidelity.

2.2b – Minimal evidence exists that teachers use data gathered from multiple assessments to plan instruction and activities that match the learning needs of students.

The review team did observe and hear about teachers collecting data from assessments related to Acuity and the 8-Step process. Thus the issue here is not about gathering data from multiple assessments, but rather about using that data to plan instruction and activities directly correlated with the learning needs of students. Some evidence, including professional learning community time and data walls, does exist to suggest that the data collected is driving instruction. However, full integration of multiple sources of student performance data into instructional and remediation plans has yet to transpire. At the time of the review, Acuity data had recently been collected. Yet when asked to describe plans for weaving students’ results from this assessment with existing data collected through 8-Step, it became clear that such protocol and procedures had yet to be developed. Ultimately, it is clear that staff and school leaders understand and are bought into the importance of utilizing multiple data sources to inform differentiated instructional planning; however, the systems and supports to make this principle a reality are not yet present.

2.2c – Evidence that teachers give feedback to students and involve them in the assessment of their work and in the setting of achievement goals is routine and consistent.

Student investment and participation in monitoring their data and progress is one facet of a data-driven instructional climate that is consistent at DFAA. Teachers frequently described students compelling them to grade their assessments as fast as possible in order for them to learn how well they performed on benchmark tests. The staff is channeling their students' investment in their own performance data by conducting routine "test talks" with students to debrief and discuss their most recent assessments as well as create action plans for improved success on subsequent exams. Teachers and school leaders further support this positive academic culture through school-wide and classroom-based incentive programs and recognition.

2.2d – Evidence that the schedule is used flexibly to ensure that individual student needs are met effectively is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

While the adoption of the 8-Step process does not require a school to build-in daily "Success Period" time for remediation and enrichment, it is strongly encouraged. Unfortunately, more often than not, schools (for a variety of reasons) do not prioritize this component as needed. DFAA, on the other hand, has built-in daily "Success Period" time to ensure there is time to address identified areas for remediation and enrichment. While having a daily "Success Period" is commendable, additional schedule flexibility is required to ensure students' remediation needs are fulfilled in an expeditious manner. Concretely speaking, a daily "Success Period" is traditionally insufficient in terms of time and delivery (e.g. the need for individualized or small group attention) for those who demonstrate pronounced skill and content knowledge gaps. The principal did mention plans to launch a Saturday school program and there is an existing community partnership that provides bi-weekly Saturday tutoring. However, additional and streamlined efforts are needed to ensure individual student needs are met.

2.2e – Minimal evidence exists that the overall impact of planning, instruction and assessment leads to effective student learning.

For this indicator, the review team considered the extent to which the intersection of planning, instruction and assessment worked in concert to promote instructional quality. At the time of the review, it was clear that these three vital elements had not yet coalesced. As described in previous sections, school leaders and staff are investing heavily in assessment, but have faced challenges pertaining to the materials, exams and implementation associated with this element. It is clear that teachers and school leaders understand and want to use student performance data as the basis for their planning and instruction. Initial efforts to make these linkages have been made, including the creation of a daily "Success Period" to address identified areas for remediation and enrichment. However, while assessment structures exist, protocol and procedures to ensure student data are uniquely driving planning and instruction are in the initial phases of development.

## **2.3: Professional Teaching Culture – Fair**

**Evidence that the professional culture within the school is routine and consistent is present, but limited.**

2.3a – Evidence that the faculty works together, incessantly and naturally to help each other improve their practice is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

DFAA has built-in team planning time to promote vertical articulation of curriculum and provide time for the analysis of student data. Teachers use this time to discuss re-teaching and enrichment needs, informed by student data. Team planning time is critical to the school's emphasis of data-driven instruction. Given the critical nature of this time, members of the review team observed a team planning session. While some structures were in place to ensure the time was utilized appropriately (e.g. agenda, note-taking), reviewers did not observe a distributed and shared sense of responsibility for the great deal of work and responsibility at hand. In other focus groups and meetings with staff, the review team noticed that a small group of teachers are taking on a lion's share of the responsibility for their grade or subject-area as it pertains to the 8-Step process. While these responsibilities are not yet fully distributed across the staff, there is a system in place to guide the analysis of student data. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, the language arts and math departments meet, respectively. During weeks with benchmark assessments, Friday's team planning time is dedicated to data input. By the following Monday at 8:00 am, the previous week's data must be inputted and a breakdown by student and standard must also be provided. Once these steps are completed, the data specialist then has until Wednesday to complete the scoring and reports. As this is happening, teachers dedicate Tuesday's team planning time to learning log work. On Wednesday the teachers receive their students' results and have through Sunday to make sense of this data, schedule students for "Success Period" and create the materials for the following week's "success period." While teacher leaders are an important facet of a broader distributed school leadership environment, the magnitude of work associated with the 8-Step process will require an even wider division of labor to curb burnout and promote staff-wide shared responsibility for student achievement.

2.3b – Evidence that the principal uses classroom observation and the analysis of learning outcomes to improve teaching and learning is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

During focus groups, teachers confirmed the school leaders' participation in student data analysis and subsequent planning for instruction and remediation. Additionally, students were comfortable, yet responsive to school leaders' presence in the hallways during transitions and class-time. Students' reactions to their school leaders presence in learning environments suggest that both administrators are frequently present and seen in classrooms and hallways. Given the multitude of initiatives that both school leaders are investing themselves in (e.g. 8-Step process, community partnership development), it is unclear to what extent they conduct routine classroom walkthroughs and how they provide frequent, instructive feedback to staff.

2.3c – Minimal evidence exists that professional development is job-embedded and directly linked to changing instructional practice in order to improve student achievement.

The review team heard about a number of professional development opportunities offered by the district during the summer. During the academic year, however, the intervention specialist has been mostly responsible for delivering professional development tied in particular to the 8-Step process and Acuity. These trainings, while job-embedded, focused more so on the protocols and systems related to the implementation of assessments and data tracking. Going forward, the intervention specialist and instructional coach should develop and implement a scope and sequence of job-embedded professional development that builds teachers' capacity to improve instructional quality now that assessment and data tracking protocols are in place.

### ***C. Domain 3: Readiness to Act: Fair***

#### **3.1: Resource Authority – Poor**

**There is minimal evidence to suggest that the principals have freedom in making decisions.**

3.1a – Minimal evidence exists that the principal has the authority to select and assign staff to positions in the school without regard to seniority.

At the time of the quality review, three classrooms were staffed by substitutes. These classrooms had been staffed by substitutes since the beginning of the school year. The review team shared their concern regarding how these classrooms were staffed with district officials at the end of the evaluation. The review team has since learned that these classrooms are now staffed by permanent teachers. Two of these three classrooms were the entire seventh-grade language arts department; the other was an eighth-grade science class. The principal reported trying to hire licensed teachers for these classrooms prior to the start of the school and in subsequent weeks. However, he was not provided the authority to do so by the district's human resources department. Given the school's tenuous academic standing, the fact that these three classrooms and in particular, the entirety of a grade's language arts department, have been staffed by substitute teachers for close to half a semester represents a serious impediment to the school's improvement imposed by the district.

3.1b – Minimal evidence exists that the school has developed adequate human resource systems.

It is important to note that this indicator applies particularly to building-level efforts at supporting its human capital. Through team planning time, there is a daily time built in with the potential for fostering teachers' monitoring and evaluation of the impact of their work. With this time in the schedule, additional efforts are needed to ensure the time is utilized in a way that distributes responsibilities and expectations for shared investment in student achievement in an equitable manner. Programs to induct and mentor new teachers to the district and building were briefly discussed in a focus group, but evidence of their

implementation and impact were not detected in subsequent conversations with teachers and staff. In sum, while a few efforts at developing rich and supportive human resource systems exist at the school-level, additional development and integration are needed.

3.1c – Evidence that the principal has the authority to implement controversial yet innovative practices is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The school leader described a number of innovative ideas and strategic plans he intends to implement this year. When pressed for details about these ideas and plans, the principal described a multi-stage rebranding strategy that in the end is designed to render DFAA a school of choice in the greater South Bend community. Given the school's numerous short-term institutional priorities, the fact that the school leader has developed a more strategic long-term plan is encouraging. However, the extent to which the district will grant him the authority to implement the plan, especially in light of the glaring substitute issue described earlier, is questionable.

3.1d – Minimal evidence exists that the school corporation enables the principal to have the freedom to make decisions.

The principal was provided the flexibility to select his assistant principal. In terms of the school corporation's understanding of the school and its unique needs, questions were raised by multiple stakeholder groups as to the specific ways in which the district supports DFAA and its improvement efforts. During the parent focus group, the review team was asked by multiple parents to investigate the frequency and scope of assistance provided by the district to the school, especially pertaining to data analysis. In other conversations, the review team heard numerous requests for assistance from the district in disaggregating data and identifying trends. During the district focus group, the review team learned that the coaches are responsible for inputting student assessment data collected through the 8-Step process. However, there is only one coach in the building and she arrived only a week prior to the review. Additionally, through conversations with many teachers the review team learned that teachers are responsible for inputting their own data and completing specific standards- and student-based analyses of the data. The variance in the district's and school's understanding of who is responsible for a critical element of the school's mission (i.e. student data input) raises serious questions about the extent of the district's understanding of the school and its needs.

3.1e – Minimal evidence exists the school corporation directs resources, including staffing, to schools differentiated on the basis of need.

The school has begun to acquire some needs-based resources from the district this year; however, the implementation of these resources has been delayed and limited. It should be noted that the district granted the principal the flexibility to hire his assistant principal and designated DFAA a Title I school this year. As a result of this designation, DFAA was assigned an instructional coach, intervention specialist and FACS (Family and Community Services) coordinator. However, the Title I instructional coach arrived at the school one week prior to this review. Additionally, the building's guidance counselor was placed there the week before school started. Given DFAA's school improvement status, these critical



personnel needed to be in place well before the school year started to do the necessary planning and outreach efforts to maximize the potential impact of their positions. Although DFAA is receiving additional supports through their Title I designation this year, it is concerning that the district did not apply for DFAA to have the flexibility to use their Title I funds for school-wide initiatives. Districts with Title I served schools are allowed to apply to the IDOE for permission to utilize Title I funds to support school-wide interventions. There are currently nineteen schools in the district which are Title I served, ten of which have approval to use their Title I funds school-wide. DFAA is not one of these ten schools. As such, the Title I resources assigned to DFAA are only supposed to be targeted towards fifth- and sixth-grade students. Thus while DFAA currently receives Title I support from the district, its scope has been limited by the absence of a school-wide Title I application.

DFAA also has a larger population of exceptional learners than district and state averages. As such, the review team hoped to learn about extensive resources and supports dedicated to those serving exceptional learners at DFAA. Instead, the team learned that the special education director at DFAA has no control over the selection of the school's paraprofessionals. Moreover, the special education department has not yet received training on the widely-adopted "Response to Instruction" model which is designed to provide teachers with tiered, targeted supports and strategies for promoting student achievement and curbing the number of students prematurely identified as exceptional learners. Lastly, during the community partners focus group, the topic of the school's FACS coordinator was raised. Given that building and capitalizing on community partnerships to support students' academic and personal growth is a priority for DFAA, the focus group presented the idea of reassigning a FACS coordinator from a high-performing school in the district to provide additional support in this critical area.

### **3.2: Resource Ingenuity – Fair**

**Evidence of the principal's resourcefulness and ingenuity is present but limited and/or inconsistent.**

3.2a – Minimal evidence exists that external partnerships have been strategically developed to engender academic improvement.

The principal articulated clearly that he is seeking community partnerships which prioritize a relationship between the school and the partner as opposed to a financial or resource allocation. As such, he has identified a number of potential community partners, particularly those with higher education connections, to grow or initiate this year. An existing partnership with Notre Dame University, "POW" or the "Power of Writing," was identified as an archetype for additional external partners given that it pulls resources in the form of college students and a relevant, standards-based curriculum into the school. The principal is also looking for external partnerships that will help him rebrand DFAA within the community. While these objectives for future community partners are noteworthy, the indicator focuses on those limited partnerships that currently exist.

3.2b – Evidence that the community is encouraged to participate in the decision-making and improvement work of the school is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The school leader is working to invest and engage community members through multiple parent forums and the development of a PTO. The principal hosted a meet the principal night at the beginning of the school. This event was attended by roughly three hundred people. During the parent focus group, the review team learned that at this event the principal received a standing ovation from the audience. The participants in the parent focus group appreciated his efforts to support and enable the establishment of a PTO at DFAA. The principal also described to the review team a series of meetings held with a small group of parents towards the beginning of the year to establish a common vision. He reported that they all agreed to focus on closing the achievement gap, with a particular focus on supporting African American males' academic achievement. Future plans to leverage this group and the broader PTO were not made clear, but these initial efforts at engaging the community are important to note.

3.2c – Evidence that the principal promotes resourcefulness and ingenuity in order to meet student needs is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

DFAA is investing heavily in the 8-Step process as a vehicle for driving student achievement across the school. In the initial stages of implementation, teachers noticed significant differences between the vocabulary used in daily instruction and on benchmark assessments. The review team observed a discussion between school and teacher leaders regarding ways to address this challenge. Teacher leaders were concerned that reviewing the assessments in advance to identify vocabulary and question types would bias their instruction. However, they also wanted to find a way to ensure their instruction set students up for success on their benchmark assessments. During this meeting, it was clear that teachers had not received a clear directive from the school leaders as to whether or not it was acceptable for them to review these assessments for the expressed purpose of improving their instruction. While school leaders were quick to say that was indeed acceptable, the fact that confusion about this matter had existed prior to this meeting was evident. It is important, however, to also note that discussion about this topic did not end once permission to review the assessments had been granted. School and teacher leaders continued to discuss the matter and in the end decided to pursue the creation of pre- and post-tests, aligned to the relevant standards for each testing window, as a way to monitor students' mastery without compromising test integrity. As an example, if students demonstrated a surprisingly low percentage of mastery on a particular standard, teachers would have pre- and post-test data as a resource to verify if the low performance was representative of vocabulary and wording or an actual need for re-teaching. While this solution will require additional work and material development at the school-level, it is an example of resourcefulness designed to meet students' needs.

3.2d – Minimal evidence exists that the school corporation has district-wide structures and strategies to maximize external resources.

The district has a student services supervisor who participated in the review team's community partnership focus group. Based on feedback from the district focus group, it seems that the fine arts and magnet facilitators are mainly responsible for developing and facilitating community partnerships, especially those pertaining to the fine arts. The mechanisms by which these and other individuals work across the district and school are

unclear and in terms of developing partnerships aligned to the school's needs, seem only to be yielding minimal results. Students in their focus group clamored for additional opportunities to engage in extracurricular and enrichment activities, especially those related to the arts.

### **3.3: Agility in the Face of Turbulence – Fair**

**Evidence of the principal's inventiveness and flexibility during conflicts and challenges is present but limited and/or inconsistent.**

3.3a – Evidence that the principal has the capacity to ensure school improvement is routine and consistent.

As discussed in previous sections, the principal, through his alignment of the vision directly with student achievement and his corresponding actions to reinforce this vision amongst the staff, students and community, has demonstrated the capacity to drive school improvement in a routine and consistent manner.

3.3b – Evidence that the principal provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

The principal has developed and established vital buy-in amongst his staff around a student achievement centered vision. In order to follow-through on the multitude of initiatives he and his staff have invested themselves in, the principal must continue to find reliable ways to delegate and distribute responsibilities accordingly. Building parent and community engagement is one area in which leveraging external support will be crucial. The parent focus group highlighted that the principal has a dedicated group of parents who are willing and able to take on leadership responsibilities in these areas. While he will most certainly need to continue to provide oversight and advisement, this is one area in which the school leader can and should delegate appropriately to ensure his focus on the school's instructional quality and core does not waiver.

3.3c – Evidence that decisions are made and plans developed on the basis of rigorous monitoring and evaluation is present, but limited and/or inconsistent.

Given that this is the school's first year utilizing the 8-Step process and Acuity testing, having numerous school-wide sources of student performance data in core subject areas remains a relatively new phenomenon at DFAA. Consequently, structures and systems to ensure that this data serves as the primary impetus for instructional, remediation and enrichment plans and decisions are in development, but not yet codified. The school leaders and staff are aware that this must be a priority in order to ensure that the data being collected is used maximally to drive student achievement, particularly for those with identified content knowledge and/or skill gaps.

## Part 4: Summary of Findings

<p><b>Dickinson Intermediate Fine Arts Academy</b> <b>October 19-20, 2011</b></p>
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### Rating Description

The TAT uses the following rating as the School Quality Rubric. The school is rated on a 1-4 scale in each of the three domains with 4 being the highest.

<b>1</b>	Red	Unacceptable	The school shows no attempt to meet the standard
<b>2</b>	Orange	Poor	The school has made minimal progress towards the standard
<b>3</b>	Yellow	Fair	The school is making progress towards the standard
<b>4</b>	Green	Acceptable	The school meets the standard

The goal is that the school receives a rating of 4 (GREEN) for the school to be considered as performing that element to an acceptable level. The 4 rating indicates the school meets the standard.

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		Finding			
		1-Unacceptable No evidence	2-Poor Minimal evidence	3-Fair Present but limited and/or inconsistent	4-Acceptable Routine and consistent
<b>Domain 1: Readiness to Learn</b>			<b>X</b>		
<b>1.1: Safety, Discipline, Engagement</b>			<b>X</b>		
Is the school culture environment safe and conducive to learning?					
<b>1.1a</b>	Students are effectively encouraged to behave well, relate well to others and to have positive attitudes toward learning.			<b>X</b>	
<b>1.1b</b>	Classrooms and hallways provide an attractive and stimulating environment that fosters high academic and personal expectations.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.1c</b>	School routines and rules are implemented consistently and communicated clearly to students, parents, and staff.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.1d</b>	The school has effective measures for promoting good attendance and eliminating truancy and tardiness.			<b>X</b>	
Do students feel secure and inspired to learn?					
<b>1.1e</b>	A robust core program ensures that students develop key learning and personal skills.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.1f</b>	The school provides a well-rounded curriculum and enrichment activities, adding interest and relevance.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.1g</b>	Career education and personal goal setting are used to raise student aspirations & motivation.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.2: Action Against Adversity</b>			<b>X</b>		
Does the school directly address students' poverty-driven challenges?					
<b>1.2a</b>	The school knows and understands the personal as well as academic needs of the students in order to address the effects of students' poverty head-on.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.2b</b>	The school addresses the needs of families so that they can better support student learning.		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.2c</b>	The school develops students' skills, behaviors, and values that enable them to effectively advocate for themselves.			<b>X</b>	
<b>1.3: Close Student-Adult Relationships</b>				<b>X</b>	
Do students have positive and enduring mentor/ teacher relationships?					
<b>1.3a</b>	The school works with parents to build positive relationships and to engage them as partners in their children's learning		<b>X</b>		
<b>1.3b</b>	The school is successful in implementing a variety of strategies specifically designed to promote a sense of connection between students and adults.				<b>X</b>

		Finding			
		1-Unacceptable No evidence	2-Poor Minimal evidence	3-Fair Present but limited and/or inconsistent	4-Acceptable Routine and consistent
<b>Domain 2: Readiness to Teach</b>				<b>X</b>	
<b>2.1: Shared Responsibility for Achievement</b>				<b>X</b>	
Does the school have a strong organizational culture, characterized by trust, respect, and mutual responsibility?					
<b>2.1a</b>	The principal ensures that there is a strong accountability for student achievement throughout the school				<b>X</b>
<b>2.1b</b>	The staff feels deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement.				<b>X</b>
<b>2.1c</b>	A shared commitment to a vision of the school which includes challenging goals for all students			<b>X</b>	
<b>2.1d</b>	The school corporation drives the accountability agenda.		<b>X</b>		
<b>2.2: Personalization of Instruction</b>				<b>X</b>	
Are diagnostic assessments used frequently and accurately to inform?					
<b>2.2a</b>	The school utilizes a coherent system to provide detailed tracking and analysis of assessment results.			<b>X</b>	
<b>2.2b</b>	Teachers use data gathered from multiple assessments to plan instruction and activities that match the learning needs of students.		<b>X</b>		
<b>2.2c</b>	Teachers give feedback to students; involve them in the assessment of their work and in the setting of achievement goals.				<b>X</b>
<b>2.2d</b>	The schedule is used flexibly to ensure that individual student needs are met effectively.			<b>X</b>	
<b>2.2e</b>	The overall impact of planning, instruction and assessment leads to effective student learning.		<b>X</b>		
<b>2.3: Professional Teaching Culture</b>				<b>X</b>	
Does the professional culture promote faculty and staff participation?					
<b>2.3a</b>	The faculty works together, incessantly and naturally to help each other improve their practice.			<b>X</b>	
<b>2.3b</b>	The principal uses classroom observation and the analysis of learning outcomes to improve teaching and learning.			<b>X</b>	
<b>2.3c</b>	Professional development is job-embedded and directly linked to changing instructional practice in order to improve student achievement.		<b>X</b>		

		Finding			
		1-Unacceptable No evidence	2-Poor Minimal evidence	3-Fair Present but limited and/or inconsistent	4-Acceptable Routine and consistent
<b>Domain 3: Readiness to Act</b>				<b>X</b>	
<b>3.1: Resource Authority</b>			<b>X</b>		
Does the principal have the freedom to make streamlined, mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money, and program?					
<b>3.1a</b>	The principal has the authority to select and assign staff to positions in the school without regard to seniority.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.1b</b>	The school has developed adequate human resource systems.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.1c</b>	The principal has the authority to implement controversial yet innovative practices.			<b>X</b>	
<b>3.1d</b>	The school corporation enables the principal to have the freedom to make decisions.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.1e</b>	The school corporation directs resources, including staffing, to schools differentiated on the basis of need.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.2: Resource Ingenuity</b>				<b>X</b>	
Is the principal adept at securing additional resources and leveraging					
<b>3.2a</b>	External partnerships have been strategically developed to engender academic improvement.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.2b</b>	The community is encouraged to participate in the decision making and improvement work of the school			<b>X</b>	
<b>3.2c</b>	The principal promotes resourcefulness and ingenuity in order to meet student needs.			<b>X</b>	
<b>3.2d</b>	School corporation has district-wide structures and strategies to maximize external resources.		<b>X</b>		
<b>3.3: Agility in the Face of Turbulence</b>				<b>X</b>	
Is the principal flexible and inventive in responding to conflicts and challenges?					
<b>3.3a</b>	The principal has the capacity to ensure school improvement.				<b>X</b>
<b>3.3b</b>	The principal provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school.			<b>X</b>	
<b>3.3c</b>	Decisions are made & plans developed on basis of rigorous monitoring and evaluation.			<b>X</b>	

## **Part 5: Recommendations**

The Technical Assistance Teams offers the following recommendations based on its review of documents, interviews, school and classroom observations, and conducting of focus groups.

### ***Domain 1: Readiness to Learn***

- **Primary Recommendations**

- Expand quality and quantity of communication of school news, routines and rules to parents, family members and community stakeholders to establish clear, consistent and impactful mediums for communication (1.1c)
  - Utilize existing parent and community allies to support the FACS coordinator (1.2a)
  - Ensure a Spanish-speaking employee is present in the front office and available to provide translation services (1.2a)
  - Establish initiatives and organizations charged with spearheading parent, community and school communication, including a Parent-Teacher organization and adult education workshops designed to build parents' capacity to support their child's personal and academic development (1.2b & 1.3a)
- Scaffold pedagogical practices from rote to rigorous instruction in order to promote higher-order thinking skills (1.1e)
- Support fine arts magnet designation with appropriate during- and after-school course opportunities and necessary dedication of human and material resources (1.1f)

- **Supplementary Recommendations**

- Increase and differentiate evidence of student work in hallways and classrooms to celebrate students' academic achievement and growth through various methods of assessment (1.1b)
- Utilize a team consisting of at least the guidance counselor and grade-level teacher leaders to augment student goal setting and career education (1.1g)

### ***Domain 2: Readiness to Teach***

- **Primary Recommendations**

- Develop protocol, procedures and systems to ensure assessment data is directly and thoroughly informing planning and instruction, utilizing multiple sources of student assessment data already being collected (i.e. Acuity and 8-Step process-related benchmark assessments) (2.2d & 2.2e)



- Drawing upon existing human capital resources, including the intervention specialist and instructional coach, develop and execute a professional development suite to build staff-wide capacity to streamline assessment data analysis with planning and instruction (2.3c)
- **Supplementary Recommendations**
  - Ensure district efforts to drive school improvement are aligned with needs for support and resources expressed by DFAA school leaders and staff (2.1d)

### ***Domain 3: Readiness to Act***

- **Primary Recommendations**
  - The district must afford the school leader the freedom to make building-based decisions regarding critical levers to drive student achievement. These include, but are not limited to, human capital, scheduling as well as financial and material resources.
    - District leadership, including human resources, must grant the school leader authority to hire all teachers and ensure any protocol or systems that will prevent this from happening are eliminated (3.1a)
    - As evidenced by the late placement of the counselor and instructional coach, limitations on the use of Title I funds and perceived inequity in the district-wide allocation of magnet-related services, district leadership must expedite and increase its allocation of critical resources and open up lines of communication with DFAA to ensure it receives the support necessary for marked improvement (3.1d & 3.1e)
  - School and district leadership as well as community stakeholders must develop and implement a strategy for creating a network of partnerships which work in concert to promote student achievement as well as students' personal growth
- **Supplementary Recommendations**
  - Improve and systematize existing efforts to develop DFAA's human capital, such as Professional Learning Communities and staff induction/mentoring programs, to ensure they foster a shared responsibility for student achievement across the school (3.1b)